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UDI pushes best practices in stable market

Andrew Gaucher | Posted: Thursday, October 8, 2015 3:23 pm



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Andrew Gaucher is incoming chairman of the Urban Development Institute's Okanagan chapter, partner and VP sales and marketing of McKinley Beach, and founder of Catalyst Land Development

Despite worry about impacts from a weaker energy sector, real estate markets in the Okanagan are in a good place.

The hangover from the 2008 correction is over, stability has returned to the valley and 2015 is showing respectable growth.

Most forecasts are the trend continues through 2016. This is a good thing, not just for buyers and sellers, but for the industry and the community as a whole.

As is the case almost everywhere, affordability and sustainability are key issues facing the Okanagan. As incoming chairman of the Okanagan chapter of Urban Development Institute, I believe a stable market environment offers an ideal opportunity for our organization, an association of professionals in the field of community development, to shift our focus from market survival strategies to opportunities to improve our practices to better meet these complex challenges.

Over the next two years, our focus at UDI will be on a set of priorities that will help us to advance our skills on these issues and in finding creative and collaborative solutions on all the components of the development cost formula, from infrastructure and building construction techniques to the formulation of and application of permit fees and development cost charges.

Construction techniques and technology are established by the B.C. Building Code and recent changes bring minimum construction requirements to new highs as we push ourselves toward improved sustainability.

In balancing these ideals with affordability, we need to look for ways to achieve these standards in ways that are creative and cost-effective and which result in our ability to create a beautiful, sustainable city.

Similarly, development cost charges, which are allocations by the municipality – on a per unit basis – of the costs associated with new development, can represent as much as 10 per cent of the price of a new home.

These charges also need to reflect a balance between the costs to be borne by new developments and existing demands for infrastructure upgrades. Water quality and its sustainable use is becoming a more vital issue requiring careful management in this region.

These are just some of the issues UDI will be working on in the coming months.

We will also continue to devote energy to public engagement, consultation and education on community development issues and to our established working relationships with local governments and our contributions to public policy development.

I am excited about my new role with UDI and the opportunities it presents to work with a wide range of talented and committed people.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my predecessor, Andrew Bruce, who has provided strong and stable leadership over the past two years and an excellent example to our organization in the realm of public engagement and municipal relations.

Andrew's background as senior planner with City of Kelowna and his fair and knowledgeable approach to building partnerships has contributed significantly to UDI's effectiveness in its work with community groups and local government.

Our entire community benefits by a collaborative approach between the development industry, community groups and local government.

Although we are all uncertain as to what the coming months and years will bring — with an imminent federal election and a rapidly changing global economic environment — I know we will all continue to challenge each other to remain committed to the ideals of affordability and sustainability and that we also remain committed to maintaining the strong working relationships that will be necessary to make our visions for the Okanagan Valley a reality.